



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE RETURNS \$3,800 TO TELEMARKETING SCAM VICTIM *Project COLT law enforcement officers disrupt con artists from Canada*

CHICAGO—Special agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today returned \$3,800 to an elderly Chicago man victimized by telemarketing con artists operating from Canada.

The victim's money was recovered by Project COLT, a multi-agency joint initiative targeting telemarketing fraud by ICE, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the FBI, and the U.S. Postal Service Inspection Service.

The 77-year-old victim received a call in early September by someone claiming to be a "customs agent," and was told he won \$25 million in the Canadian lottery. The caller instructed the victim to wire a \$3,800 "processing fee" to Montreal, Canada so the winnings could be released. After wiring the initial payment, the victim was contacted again at the end of September and instructed to send an additional \$3,800 in cash, which he did.

Elissa A. Brown, special agent-in-charge for the Chicago ICE office, warns Illinois residents to be vigilant about such scams, which have already bilked people – especially senior citizens – in the United States out of tens of millions of dollars.

"There's no such thing as free money," said Brown. "This victim was lucky to get half his money returned. Most scam victims are not so fortunate. These sophisticated con artists appear trustworthy to their victims who aren't used to such deceitful tactics."

Brown said that in the past two years the Chicago ICE office has returned more than \$65,000 to 130 Illinois victims of such scams. These same victims, however, had sent more than \$859,000 to these con artists.

In another Illinois case, ICE agents recovered \$12,200 and returned it to an elderly Barrington man bilked out of more than \$250,000 over the past two years in a similar version of the long-running telemarketing scam.

Telemarketing fraud, which primarily targets elderly victims in the United States, has resulted in the loss of tens of millions of dollars by people who are least able to recover from financial loss. Victims often lose their entire life savings. Fraudulent telemarketers represent themselves to victims as lawyers, government officials, police officers, accountants or lottery company officials. The victims are told that they will receive a sum of money varying from thousands to millions of dollars in lottery winnings.

The focus of Project COLT is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle telemarketing fraud operations. Project COLT consists of law enforcement officers who intercept funds (usually bank drafts and cashiers' checks), so they can be recovered and ultimately returned to victims. These officers also work to prevent further victimization both through public education, and by prosecuting those who commit fraud.

Project COLT members also have formed partnerships with Canada Customs and Revenue, Canada Post Corporation, Federal Express, Purolator, United Parcel Service, DHL and other companies to assist with fund interception and return.

To report suspicious telemarketing activity, members of the public can contact Project COLT's hotline at 888-495-8501.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.